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ABSTRACT

Interfering with the ability of community colleges to face the challenges involved in fulfilling their multiple missions is the fact that the colleges are often regarded as "inferior" when compared to four-year baccalaureate institutions. Ironically, many of the concessions that community colleges have made to gain stature have hurt, rather than enhanced, their image. Shifting to the academic calendar, and to a collegiate credit system, has hindered occupational program delivery, while adopting general education requirements has exacerbated credit transfer problems for community college transfer students. In no area is the imbalance of status felt more deeply than transfer. Faculty at four-year schools often regard community college transfer students as inferior, even though they perform as well academically as native students. Moreover, four-year institutions dominate decisions about transfer and are unlikely to relinquish control unless forced to do so by accrediting agencies or state mandate. This imbalance of power has suppressed the community colleges' freedom to set curriculum, particularly limiting interdisciplinary and innovative course offerings. Yet, community colleges continue to serve successfully a diverse and growing population, performing critical and often disparate functions under heavy constraints. Examples of positive collaboration between two- and four-year institutions do exist. Community colleges need not live in the shadow of baccalaureate institutions; equal partnership between two- and four-year schools is vital to achieving effective education for the nation's citizens. (MAB)

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IN THE SHADOW OF BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS

by Jan Ignash

Today's community colleges face challenges from many directions. The changing domestic economy has altered the training and re-training needs of the U.S. workforce. New immigrants often require both language and career training. The numbers of adolescent and adult disadvantaged learners who require remediation and career training continues to grow. And the basic literacy skills of the entering workforce are declining just at a time when labor market needs for well-educated workers are increasing. Interfering with the ability of the community colleges to meet these challenges is the fact that they are often regarded as "inferior" institutions of higher education when compared to four-year baccalaureate institutions. This digest presents an overview of the ways in which community colleges have traditionally been dominated by universities and colleges and describes means by which this imbalance can be corrected.

The view that community colleges are inherently inferior is not new. Renowned educators such as Henry F. Tappan and F. J. Goodnow have regarded the first two years of undergraduate work as secondary, rather than postsecondary, in nature. In 1925, Goodnow, President of Johns Hopkins University, stated that the provision of the first two years of undergraduate work at the university was the "kind of instruction . . . given to masses of somewhat immature minds" and impeded the *real* work of the university, that of research and advanced-level teaching (Eells, 1931). This view, though sadly out-of-touch with the tremendous learning and teaching which take place in community colleges, persists today.

Community College Attempts to Gain Stature

The concessions that community colleges have made to gain stature may unfortunately have hurt rather than enhanced their image. Two-year institutions have adopted the academic calendar, even when it does not fit the needs of occupational students. They have adopted the collegiate credit system, so necessary for the transfer of collegiate function courses but so awkward for many occupational courses. They have incorporated general education requirements into associate degree programs, thereby increasing the status of some occupational degrees, but creating never-ending problems in transferring these general education requirements to four-year institutions. They have created occupational certificate programs for those students who do not want an associate's degree, and inadvertently created the view by some officials that certificate programs are failures if students do not finish, even if some students never intended to finish. But though these changes have been made, community colleges still have not achieved the prestige they seek.

Unequal "Partners" in Transfer

In no area is the imbalance in status felt more deeply than in the area of transfer, which is ironically one of the strongest functions of the community colleges. In some four-year institutions today, one-half of the students come from community colleges (Mellander and Robertson, 1992). Studies have shown that community college students who transfer perform as well academically and in persistence-to-degree as native baccalaureate students (Barry and Barry, 1992). Yet, transfer students are often regarded as "inferior" by faculty at four-year institutions, since their learning styles, modes of expression, and values may be in sharp contrast to those of traditional students (Mellander and Robertson, 1992).

Four-year institutions dominate decisions about transfer and are unlikely to relinquish their control unless forced to do so by state mandate. In 1973, thirty-two states had articulation and transfer agreements which were established by legal mandate or state agency policy (Barry and Barry, 1992). States with formal legal mechanisms which demand compliance, such as Florida, Missouri, Texas, Washington, and Rhode Island, have the most successful transfer programs. Next in strength of transfer policies are those states with state-wide mandatory articulation agreements negotiated between community colleges and four-year institutions and formalized at the state level, such as California, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey and Arizona. The next level of transfer agreement is voluntary between two- and four-year institutions, as in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Minnesota. Some states, however, still have weak transfer arrangements, where few formal agreements exist and legislation merely encourages institutions to collaborate on transfer. In these cases, transfer may be worked out between individual departments and colleges, and the agreements may not hold when the individuals creating them have left the university (Moore, 1989).

The unequal balance of power in the transfer process has several negative consequences for the community college curriculum. First, freedom to set the curriculum is suppressed, since the community colleges must offer courses which are acceptable for transfer by a particular department at the university. Interdisciplinary courses, so beneficial for the integration of knowledge, can not find an academic home and are not transferrable. As a result, inventive teaching methods and innovative courses may not be developed, and students' needs may not be met. Until community college faculty and administration lobby for and gain better articulation agreements, they will not become equal partners in the transfer process.

The Role of Accrediting Agencies in Transfer

Accrediting agencies also have borne much of the burden in facilitating transfer agreements which are fair to community college students. In 1980, the Council on Postsecondary Education recognized 39 specialized accreditation or approval bodies (Kells and Parish, 1986). The National League for Nursing has already set guidelines for nursing students to enroll in general education classes with other majors and has issued policy statements on curriculum to allow students to

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change from one nursing practice to another (Prager, 1992). It is a short step for accrediting agencies from curricular issues like those described above to general transfer issues.

The Role of Scholarship to Enhance Stature

A reason often given for the inferior status of community colleges is that their faculty are occupied solely with teaching and are not -- like faculty at four-year institutions -- engaged in research and scholarship. However, just as faculty at baccalaureate institutions are not all active participants in research and scholarship, a significant number of community college faculty are engaged in applied classroom research and different types of scholarship. If the definition of scholarship were broadened to include book reviews, annotated bibliographies, outside lectures, reviews of existing research, or speeches, then community college faculty would be given credit for much of the scholarly activities in which they now engage (Vaughan, 1992).

Excellence Within the Community Colleges

Hammons defines excellence as "accomplishing your mission, your goals and your objectives in a cost-efficient manner, while maintaining a positive institutional climate for staff and students" (Hammons, 1992). And this is indeed what many community colleges are doing quite well. They are often the only chance for postsecondary education for many adults and high school graduates. They have dedicated faculty who teach to student needs and who excel in pedagogy. They have counseling and assessment centers which do not view efforts to encourage and motivate students as "coddling" or "handholding." And they provide a supportive environment for the educationally disadvantaged, making it possible for students who were not prepared for college in high school to acquire the skills and motivation they need to transfer to four-year institutions.

Equal Partners through Consortia and Collaboration

The argument has been made that four-year institutions need to realize their debt to community colleges and to start to regard them as equal partners in the process of providing higher education to the nation's adults. Community colleges take pressure for admission off the baccalaureate institutions. They also provide services for special populations of students which four-year institutions are not always well-equipped to handle. Collaboration and cooperation are to be encouraged in an equal relationship between two-year and four-year institutions, rather than the unequal relationship which has traditionally characterized two-year and four-year college associations.

Examples of positive collaboration do exist. Currently, several consortia are operating which encourage institutions to pool resources and equipment, to co-teach courses, to expand curricular opportunities and to increase research opportunities. The Central Florida Consortium of Higher Education, composed of one university and five community colleges, has organized to share resources and has held workshops on a variety of topics. The Community College Consortium, composed of three universities and 75 community colleges in 18 states and Canada, evolved to address issues of institutional effectiveness, leadership, strategic management, teaching and learning. The North Texas Community/Junior College Consortium, with nine community colleges and one university, developed to pursue research and professional development on the improvement of community college education. Other consortia, such as the Florida Community Junior College Inter-Institutional Research Council and Michigan Colleges' Consortium for Faculty Development, promote research and faculty development (May and Smith, 1992). Through collaborative efforts such as these, communication is enhanced between institutions, the community service function of all sectors of higher education is better served, smaller institutions are assisted in expanding opportunities for their students, the need for state-mandated action is diminished, and opportunities for research are expanded (May and Smith, 1992).

Community colleges serve a diverse and growing population, performing critical and often disparate functions while laboring under heavy constraints. Community colleges need not live in the shadow of baccalaureate institutions. Collaboration as equal partners is critical to achieving effective education for the nation's citizens.

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This digest was drawn in part from *Prisoners of Elitism: The Community College's Struggle for Stature*, New Directions for Community Colleges, Number 78, edited by Billie Wright Dziech and William Vilter, published in September 1992. The cited articles are: "Tradition and Transformation: Academic Roots and the Community College Future," by Gustavo A. Mellander and Bruce Robertson; "The Community College Unbound," by George B. Vaughan; "Establishing Equality in the Articulation Process," by Roger J. Barry and Phyllis A. Barry; "Accreditation and Transfer: Mitigating 'Elitism' by Carolyn Prager; "Gaining Stature Through Community College-University Consortia," by Gwen May and Al Smith; and "To Acquire Stature:..To 'Thine Own Self Be True'," by James O. Hammons.

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